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# Towards a Discursive Parapsychology

## Language and the Laboratory Study of Anomalous Communication

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**ABSTRACT.** In recent years there has been a change in attitudes among psychologists and social scientists towards ostensibly paranormal experiences in general, and parapsychological research in particular. Instead of seeking to endorse or debunk claims of paranormal experience, attention has shifted to the analysis of the broader psychological, social and cultural implications of reports of anomalous phenomena. This paper contributes to this trend by arguing for a discursive psychological study of interaction between experimenter and subject in parapsychology laboratory experiments. Parapsychological experiments rely on mundane interactional practices which invoke the relevance of, or make explicit reference to, psychological and parapsychological states. These laboratory interactions can be investigated by conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychology. Some preliminary observations on data from ganzfeld ESP experiments are offered to illustrate the range of empirical issues which may be explored. These concern the socially organized properties of reports of conscious imagery; the use of a psychological thesaurus as part of the experimenter's work; and the management of affiliation in experimenter-subject interaction. These observations suggest that discursive psychological research can be undertaken despite the controversial status of evidence for extra-sensorimotor communication. The paper argues that the discursive psychological studies of interaction in parapsychological experiments can yield findings relevant to the concerns of both parapsychology and discursive psychology, and can contribute to methodological issues in the broader study of consciousness.

**KEY WORDS:** anomalous experience, consciousness, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, parapsychology

This paper argues for a discursive psychological study of anomalous human experiences which are associated with, or suggest the possibility of, extra-

sensorimotor or parapsychological communication: interaction between humans and their social and physical environment without the use of the known senses.

Parapsychology is the scientific investigation of the possibility of extra-sensorimotor communication. Although in part stimulated by anecdotal reports of precognition, ghosts and apparitions, telepathy and contact with spirits, it has modelled itself on the natural sciences. Thus the vast majority of parapsychological studies have been conducted in laboratories, involving thousands of experimental trials with ordinary subjects, the results of which are analysed using rigorous statistical techniques. The objective of these experiments was, firstly, to find evidence for psi, the mental faculty which is taken to underpin various forms of ostensible parapsychological phenomena, such as mind-to-mind communication or the ability of the mind to influence the external physical environment. The second objective was to examine the physical and psychological factors that influenced the operation of psi. (Introductions to the history and development of parapsychology can be found in Broughton, 1991; Edge, Morris, Palmer, & Rush, 1986; Irwin, 1999; Radin, 1997).

The psychological community has been largely sceptical about the existence of paranormal phenomena. Thus psychological research on paranormal experiences has tended to focus on the cognitive or perceptual errors or distortions which lead people to believe they have experienced some kind of extraordinary phenomena (Forer, 1949; Hyman, 1977; Jones & Russel, 1980; Roe, 1995; Singer & Benassi, 1981; Zusne & Jones, 1989). And because of its controversial nature, parapsychological work, and parapsychologists themselves, have been the subject of intense—sometimes overtly hostile—critical scrutiny by sceptics and debunkers (e.g. Alcock, 1981, 1987; Hanlon, 1974; Kurtz, 1985; Randi, 1988; see also the journal *The Sceptical Enquirer*). Moreover, surveys of attitudes to paranormal phenomena among the scientific community reveal that psychologists are often the most resistant to the possibility of forms of parapsychological communication, such as extra-sensory perception and telepathy; they are also extremely sceptical about the scientific credibility of parapsychology (McClenon, 1982). It would seem, then, that the psychological community has traditionally seen little value in studying claims of anomalous phenomena.

There are signs, however, that there is a change in the mainstream response to parapsychological research in particular, and the study of anomalous experiences in general. There are two reasons for this change: first, parapsychologists have gone to great lengths to ensure that experimental research and the evaluation of results is conducted to accepted scientific standards; and, second, there is renewed interest in the significance of anomalous experiences within the social sciences. We will consider each in turn, and then identify the distinctive contribution of a discursive psychological approach.

## Parapsychology as Contested Science

The sceptics' position is that parapsychology is a pseudo-science; and a key part of their argument is that it has failed to produce cumulative and replicable evidence of the existence of anomalous communication (Alcock, 1981, 1987; Hyman, 1995). But there is evidence that parapsychologists may have addressed this criticism, certainly to the satisfaction of some non-parapsychologists. For example, after reviewing the statistical evidence from a range of parapsychological experiments from the United States and Europe conducted over a period of approximately twenty-five years, the statistician Jessica Utts (1995) wrote: 'This is a robust effect that, were it not in such an unusual domain, would no longer be questioned by science as a real phenomenon. It is unlikely that methodological problems could account for the remarkable consistency of the results' (p. 310). And she concludes: 'It is clear to this author that anomalous cognition is possible and has been demonstrated. . . . The phenomenon has been replicated in a number of forms across laboratories and cultures' (p. 311).

Some of the evidence Utts considered came from ganzfeld ESP studies. The ganzfeld is an experimental procedure in which subjects are in a relaxed state, in an environment which minimizes variations in sensory input. There are numerous variations in the ganzfeld procedure, but, typically, a sender (usually an experimenter or a friend of the subject) tries mentally to send or project images of a target: usually a video clip from a large database chosen randomly by specifically modified software. This clip will be shown several times during the 'sending' part of the experiment. After the sending period, the subject is shown four video clips: the target and three others. On the basis of the images and sensations experienced during the sending phase, the subject has to nominate which clip they think the sender was trying to project. Therefore, there is a 25 per cent, or one-in-four, probability of a correct identification of the target clip by chance alone.

Charles Honorton was a leading ganzfeld researcher. In 1985 he published a meta-analysis of all known ganzfeld experiments, concluding that there was statistically significant evidence of anomalous communication (Honorton, 1985). The sceptic and psychologist Ray Hyman analysed Honorton's data set and disagreed: he argued that the effect Honorton had identified could be explained by reference to methodological flaws in the ganzfeld experiment (Hyman, 1985). But instead of instigating a prolonged debate about their respective positions, they wrote a joint paper in which they outlined a more stringent ganzfeld methodology. The reasoning behind this was that 'If psi is responsible for the outcomes obtained in this database, then the ganzfeld experiment should continue to produce successful outcomes when the various problems that Hyman pointed out are eliminated' (Hyman & Honorton, 1986, p. 353). Up to 1989 Honorton conducted 354 ganzfeld sessions which incorporated the recommendations from the joint

Hyman–Honorton paper. Subjects correctly identified the target clip in 34 per cent of the sessions (Radin, 1997). This was roughly in line with the above-chance hit-rate obtained from his earlier meta-analysis. In response to this finding, Hyman (1991) wrote: ‘Honorton’s experiments have produced intriguing results. If . . . independent laboratories can produce similar results with the same relationships and with the same attention to rigorous methodology, then parapsychology may indeed have captured its elusive quarry’ (p. 392). Since then, ganzfeld ESP experiments undertaken by other researchers in other laboratories have produced above-chance results of a similar order to those reported by Honorton (Bierman, 1995; Broughton & Alexander, 1995; da Silva, Pilato, & Hiraoka, 2003; Morris, Dalton, Delanoy, & Watt, 1995; A. Parker, Grams, & Pettersson, 1998; Schlitz & Honorton, 1992). An account of Honorton’s work was even published in a prestigious mainstream psychology journal (Bem & Honorton, 1994).

Meta-analysis has been an important tool in the evaluation of parapsychological research. In 1997 Radin conducted a meta-analysis of all known ganzfeld studies to that point. There had been 2,549 individual sessions with an overall hit rate of 33.2 per cent. Radin claims that the odds against this being a chance result were over a million, billion to one (Radin, 1997, p. 88). However, despite the apparent replications, the value of the ganzfeld is still a controversial issue in parapsychology (Milton, 1999; Schmiedler & Edge, 1999). There have been other meta-analyses which question the claim that anomalous communication had been demonstrated and replicated (Milton & Wiseman, 1997). But these studies have been criticized in turn for including experiments which did not conform to the standard ganzfeld procedure; and there seems to be evidence that there is a correlation between the extent to which a ganzfeld experiment adheres to the standard procedure and its chances of obtaining statistically significant results (Bem, Palmer, & Broughton, 2001; see also Storm, 2000; Storm & Ertel, 2002).

It would be inaccurate to imply that only ganzfeld experiments offer replications of ostensibly anomalous communication. Radin (1997) documents a range of apparently robust effects across a range of experimental designs (see also May, 1996; Utts, 1986, 1995). Moreover, it is certainly not the case that the ganzfeld procedure always produces significant results, and there is disagreement within the parapsychological community regarding the ultimate value of the ganzfeld method (see, e.g., Milton, 1999; and the debate in Schmiedler & Edge, 1999).

Parapsychology’s scientific status is still a controversial matter, despite the suggestive results from ganzfeld research. But perhaps this should be no surprise: sociological studies of controversies in science suggest that the status (and possible acceptance) of controversial knowledge claims is unlikely to be decided by a single experiment: the emergence or absence of consensus, political and social allegiances, and sheer incredulity all inform the way the scientific community responds to controversial claims (Brannigan, 1981;

Collins, 1985/1992; Collins & Pinch, 1982; Kuhn, 1970). However, there does seem to be a reduction in the hostility to parapsychological claims in the mainstream academic community. For example, in the UK, a recent undergraduate and A level (pre-university) psychology textbook devoted a section to a serious—albeit cautious—discussion of parapsychology in general and the ganzfeld studies in particular (Hayes, 2000). Moreover, ganzfeld research is being undertaken in psychology departments in a number of UK universities. This in turn suggests that parapsychologists are being employed in UK higher education institutions, and that psychology departments are willing to support their research. Finally, it is worth noting the publication of Cardena, Lynn, and Krippner's (2000) collection of papers on the varieties of anomalous experiences. This is a serious and sober consideration of a wealth of scientific evidence about a range of marginal or exceptional states, many of which would be considered parapsychological or paranormal. The inclusion of papers on ostensible psi phenomena in such a collection establishes a clear link between the concerns of parapsychology and the broader psychological investigation of marginal experiences.

### **Renewed Interest in the Value of Studying Anomalous Experiences**

In recent years some psychologists have begun to explore paranormal experiences because it is believed they can reveal hitherto unexamined aspects of the nature of cognition, personality and human communication (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Cardena et al., 2000; Tart, 1997). The objective has not been to debunk or endorse experiences, but to see how they 'fit in' to psychological and social life: to develop a sophisticated understanding of their form, origins and their implications for our understanding of the individual.

This mirrors developments in a range of related disciplines. Philosophers have pondered the significance of paranormal experiences for our understanding of mind and consciousness (Lorimer, 2001; Strober & Meynell, 1996), as have neuroscientists, surgeons and clinicians (e.g. Parnia, Waller, Yeates, & Fenwick, 2001; van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, & Elfferich, 2001). Scholars of contemporary culture and historians have examined how the narratives of belief in the paranormal reflect and embody broader ideological, political and religious contexts (Clark, 2001; Hess, 1994; McClenon, 1990). Folklorists have studied the phenomenology of paranormal experiences and the ways in which core components of these experiences are embedded in, or independent of, particular cultural traditions (Bennett, 1987; Hufford, 1982, 1995). In anthropology there is a growing argument that shamanistic or spiritual experiences encountered during fieldwork cast Western notions of self, agency and consciousness in new

light (Blain, 2002; Walker, 1995; Young & Goulet, 1994). Finally, sociologists have tried to develop methods which neither debunk nor endorse supernatural explanations for claimed experiences, but instead seek to identify the organized patterns of communication through which such beliefs and experiences are negotiated and maintained (Williams, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992; 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2005) and their implications for wider social institutions (Campbell & McIver, 1987; McClenon, 1994; Westrum, 1977, 1979).

Three themes connect these disparate studies. First, researchers do not seek to explain these experiences as psychological aberrations. Instead, they are treated as normal aspects of Western and non-Western culture. Second, there has been an attempt to understand what the phenomenological features of accounts of anomalous experiences may reveal about the human condition. In particular, it has been argued that these kinds of experiences provide an opportunity to enrich our understanding of, for example, consciousness, spirituality and the various ways in which reality may be perceived. Finally, common to many of these approaches is a concern with the ways in which paranormal experiences are communicated. By studying how people communicate their experiences—the language and organization of spoken and textual accounts—we can gain insight into the wider web of tacit cultural knowledge regarding notions of self, agency and society.

There are, then, two reasons why we might begin to look afresh at anomalous or paranormal experiences. First, there is at least suggestive evidence that some form of extra-sensorimotor communication can be demonstrated and replicated experimentally. If we accept these results at face value, they represent a startling challenge to prevailing psychological orthodoxy. This alone may stimulate further psychological research. It is likely, though, that most psychologists will remain unconvinced that the findings from experimental studies demonstrate hitherto unrecognized communicative facilities. But even so, we can continue to explore the extent to which social scientific approaches can be used to investigate anomalous experiences to reveal their personal and cultural significance. The value of this project is independent of the ontological status of the kinds of paranormal phenomena for which claims are made. And it is here that discursive psychology becomes relevant.

### **Discursive Psychology and Parapsychological Experiments**

Discursive psychology rejects the traditional cognitivist paradigm in psychology which treats inner mental processes as the proper topic for empirical research and theorizing. From this dominant perspective, discourse of all kinds—talk and texts—is taken simply as expressing or representing in various ways the workings of these inner mental processes. Discursive

psychology challenges this version of the relationship between discourse and cognition.

There are various kinds of discursive psychology. While these share a broadly critical stance towards cognitivism in contemporary psychology, they each draw from a different intellectual traditions. Harré offers a more conceptual analysis of the relations between language and the mind which is informed by Wittgenstein's later writings (Harré, 1989, 1995; see also Coulter, 1979, 1989). Ian Parker (1997) offers a discursive psychology in the context of a broadly Marxist critique of prevailing orthodoxy in academic psychology. Billig's analysis of the ideological dimensions of everyday discourse is rooted in rhetoric and argumentation (Billig, 1987). The most sustained development of discursive psychology, however, is associated with the work of Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter, and is strongly influenced by conversation analytic studies of verbal interaction in everyday and institutional contexts (Edwards, 1995b, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 2000; Potter & Edwards, 2003).

Studies in this discursive psychological tradition have dealt with a wide spectrum of topics. Researchers have examined the ways in which recollections and rememberings are produced in a range of settings, and for a variety of inferential tasks (Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Potter & Edwards, 1990; Woffitt, 1992). There have been studies of emotion discourse (Edwards, 1999), evaluations of food preferences (Wiggins, 2001; Wiggins, Potter, & Wildsmith, 2001), and the talk of sex offenders (Auburn & Lea, 2003) and interaction in police questioning of suspects (Auburn, Lea, & Drake, 1999). There has been a sustained critical reappraisal of attribution theory and script theory which takes as its point of departure the observation that formulations of events and causes are produced with respect to interactional or inferential concerns (Edwards, 1994, 1995a; Potter & Edwards, 1990). Finally, there are a number of studies of the ways in which the relevance of characterizations of identity may be established in talk (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996; Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Edwards, 1991; Nikander, 2002; Widdicombe, 1993; Widdicombe & Woffitt, 1990, 1995).

Potter and Edwards (2003) outline the three strands of a conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychological research. First, as part of the critique of traditional approaches, psychological topics are re-cast as features of verbal and textual activities.

Discursive psychologists ask: What does a 'memory' *do* in some interaction? How is a version of the past constructed to sustain some *action*? Or: what is an 'attitude' used to *do*? How is an evaluation built to assign blame to a minority group, say, or how is an evaluation used to persuade a reluctant adolescent to eat tuna pasta? (Potter, 2000, p. 35)



There is a shift, for example, from thinking about 'memory' as a set of storage and retrieval facilities hardwired into the physiological structures of the brain, towards the study of the action orientation of discourse in which people offer recollections. Second, there is the study of the psychological thesaurus: the ways in which psychological terms are used to perform work in discourse. Finally, there is the study of the ways in which discourse is used to manage implied psychological themes or states.

Discursive psychology adopts a position of methodological relativism with respect to the topic of talk, in that it is unconcerned about the ontological status of the referents of talk which indexes mental states, or communication which involves the use of a psychological thesaurus (Potter, 1996; but see Hammersley 2003; Potter, 2003). In this it parallels the methodological relativism advocated by some sociologists of scientific knowledge as a way of allowing them to explore the social dimensions which underpinned knowledge claims which the scientific community took to be true accounts of the physical universe (e.g. Collins, 1992; Collins & Pinch, 1982). Similarly, discursive psychology does not seek the truth behind talk, but focuses on the interactional and inferential work accomplished by socially organized discourse practices (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Edwards, 2003). In this, it also aligns itself with the position adopted in conversation analysis, in which the analysis of the sequential organizations through which interaction occurs is largely undertaken without consideration of the accuracy or truth of people's talk, nor their intentions, goals, motives, and so on (Heritage 1984a; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Sacks, 1992).

There are number of reasons why the empirical approach of a conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychology is appropriate to parapsychology.

Parapsychological studies of ostensible extra-sensorimotor communication rely on everyday communicative skills. For example, a typical ganzfeld trial is managed through phases of discursive activity. During the mentation—the 'sending' period of the experiment—the subject is required to attend solely to the phenomena of his or her consciousness, and to report his or her sensations and experiences. How exactly is this done? What socially organized descriptive practices are drawn upon when subjects are required to offer a commentary on their consciousness as a subject in a parapsychological experiment?

To what extent, and how, do subjects draw upon a psychological or parapsychological thesaurus to constitute the sense or character of their experiences? During the mentation review the experimenter will go over his or her notes of the subject's mentation; this provides the opportunity for the subject to confirm them, expand upon them, or spontaneously add further information, or offer some new account. Among ganzfeld researchers it is assumed that, if psi is occurring, then the subject's conscious experiences

during the sending period will provide important clues as to how it works and how psi interacts with other cognitive processes. The subsequent review, in which the experimenter's record of the subject's mentation may be revised, or in which further information about the subject's conscious experiences may be elicited, is therefore a significant part of the experimental procedure. However, unlike the mentation, in which the subject offers a monologic narrative, the subsequent review is thoroughly interactional. It is underpinned by experimenters' and subjects' tacit knowledge of everyday interactional practices: the organization of turn-taking, the management of clarification and correction, the coordination of non-verbal activities such as laughter, and so on. This suggests various discursive psychological lines of inquiry: how are claims about conscious experience managed interactionally? What procedures inform the way in which the status of the subject's reports is established?

The discourse of parapsychological laboratory experiments thus provides rich ground for discursive psychological research, as it is replete with the use of a cognitive vocabulary, and the reference to or invocation of the relevance of everyday mental states and processes, such as memories, imagery, inferences and assumptions. Moreover, the participants are orientating to the possibility of more controversial extra-sensory perception. This (para)psychological work is managed through everyday interactional practices—describing, turn-taking, the production of questions and answers, the management of repair—mobilized with respect to the requirements of particular contingencies of activities in parapsychology laboratories. A conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychology offers analysis of the ways in which (para)psychological work is managed in the weave of mundane interaction.

The analysis of the communicative competencies through which participants in parapsychology experiments orient to and negotiate the presence and relevance of psychological abilities does not commit us to adopting a realist position on the existence of controversial or more mundane psychological states. Discursive psychology's methodological agnosticism means that analysis can proceed unhindered by the requirement to arbitrate on the ultimate ontological status of ostensible anomalous communication. Instead, it seeks to examine how participants collaboratively realize and achieve the relevance and properties of ostensibly psychological states *for* and *through* their communicative practices. In this it mirrors work in related social sciences which eschews the restrictive choice between endorsing or debunking ostensibly paranormal experiences, in favour of an attempt to examine their psychological, social and cultural significance.

In the rest of this paper we will outline some preliminary observations from a study of discourse in parapsychological experiments. These indicate the kinds of analytic issues which may be explored through discursive parapsychology, and suggest some further lines of the inquiry. These data

come from ganzfeld experiments conducted in the mid-1990s by researchers at the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at the University of Edinburgh, UK (Dalton et al., 1996; Morris et al., 1995).

### **Describing Consciousness: The Mentation**

According to parapsychologists, if anomalous communication is occurring during the mentation phase of the ganzfeld procedure, the subject will be receiving images and sensations connected in some way to the target video. What the subject experiences during this time is therefore of great interest to parapsychologists. Consequently, in the Edinburgh experiments, the subjects were asked to report whatever 'came to mind' during the approximately 30-minute sending period. Visual and auditory stimuli were minimized during the mentation period to maximize the subjects' focus on his or her own consciousness. In this phase of the experiment, the experimenter can hear the subject through headphones, and takes notes of his or her remarks. These notes form the basis of the next stage of the procedure, the mentation review. During the mentation, however, the subject cannot hear the experimenter. The following extract illustrates the kinds of reports subjects produce during the mentation.

- (1) (01-18 E1/M: Mentation. In this and subsequent extracts, 'E' is the experimenter, 'S' is the subject. Transcription symbols are explained in the Appendix.)

1 S: I can see a slope with er: some sort of door way at the top.  
 2 (30)  
 3 S: Eyes are beginning to ache a little bit.  
 4 (28)  
 5 S: 'hh roof again (1) 'h looking straight up at it  
 6 (28)  
 7 S: 'Hhhh toothbrush (0.2) (it)'s all wrapped up in  
 8 its package 'hh spinning round between somebody's finger  
 9 and thumb.  
 10 (5)  
 11 S: 'h I think it's a (.) big toothbrush with blue  
 12 letters on it.  
 13 (7)  
 14 S: Mickey Mouse  
 15 (16)  
 16 S: (s'm'n a) in slow motion like a (0.7) 'hh oh:: s'like a dri:ll=like  
 17 a (1.3) 'hh hhh I see the threads of a drill spinning round.  
 18 (6)  
 19 S: could be (th-) octopus spinning  
 20 (12)  
 21 S: I've a humming top that's spinning now,

22 (8)

23 S: children's toys like bricks and cubes . . .

((*continues*))

We might assume that this is a simple matter of description: the subject, say, 'sees' an image of a toothbrush, or Mickey Mouse, and reports it. Certainly parapsychologists who have studied the content of mentations treat subjects' report as neutral representations of inner mental events. For example, Parker et al. (1998) studied recordings of subject mentations synchronized with the playing of the video target. This allowed them to point out some remarkable similarities between the clips and the subjects' reports: for example, one subject reported 'someone who is shot by a rifle' at the same time that a film clip depicting one man shooting another with a pistol was being played (Parker et al., 1998, pp. 72–74). However, there are problems with assuming that a report is a neutral representation of an impression or image in consciousness.

Sociological and philosophical studies of language have made a compelling case that description is not a passive activity. No descriptive utterance can exhaust the particulars of the state of affairs to which it refers (Heritage, 1978; Waismann, 1965; Wittgenstein, 1953). The description of any event can be extended indefinitely. Moreover, empirical studies in conversation and discourse analysis show that descriptions are constructed with respect to the interactional and inferential tasks for which they were produced (Potter, 1996; Sacks, 1992; Smith, 1978; Woffitt, 1992). Even reports of private mental events, such as 'things we remember', are ordered with respect to interactional contingencies (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Lynch & Bogen, 1996).

The relevance of a particular description, then, has an interactional and, therefore, social basis. Moreover, the descriptive resources we use are drawn from culturally-available, communicative competencies: any act of description will inevitably trade upon broader, tacitly organized social knowledge about discursive activities. Thus to treat a report of a particular item in a mentation as a neutral or passive report, somehow shorn of all social relevance, would be an error. If everyday communicative competencies are being used, then background assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge which inform the use of those competencies in their natural domain—everyday interaction—need to be explored and understood.

There are two upshots. First, there are new lines of discursive psychological research. For example, mentation reports can be analysed to reveal the socially organized descriptive practices through which they are constructed. So, we can ask: is it possible to identify categorical relationships (Edwards, 1991; Sacks, 1972) between discrete mentation items? Do category-bound descriptions influence or inform subsequent descriptions? Is there some form of overarching categorical ordering which can be traced through mentation reports? In extract 1, there is a report of 'Mickey Mouse':

an iconic Disney children's cartoon character. Subsequently, there is reference to a spinning object and bricks and cubes. Does the culturally available category association of Mickey Mouse with children inform the subsequent description of bricks and cubes as *children's toys*? How does the notion of 'spinning' change through the references to a drill, an octopus and a humming top? These kinds of questions in turn raise interesting methodological issues for discursive psychology. In conversation analysis, and, to an increasing degree, in discursive psychology, analysis focuses on how participants themselves are making sense of the moment-by-moment unfolding of interaction. One way this is done is by examining how a turn shows its producer's understanding of the activity or sense of a prior turn. But in the absence of such a proof procedure (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, p. 702), how would such categorical relationships be demonstrated empirically? Any contribution to such a thorny methodological issue would be of real benefit to qualitative studies of monologic, multi-unit single speaker turns.

For parapsychologists, the mentation is simply a publicly available record of a private experience: it is a transparent and neutral account of the way in which images emerge in consciousness. A discursive psychological approach, however, does not treat language as a neutral medium for the mere expression of a realm of inner psychological events, but instead investigates the linguistic practices through which claims about consciousness are warrantably and reasonably achieved as social practices. As such, it raises a series of novel empirical questions about the construction and organization of mentation reports.

Logically, every item in a mentation report could be described in terms of way in which it comes into conscious awareness: as an image, an impression, something which is sensed, seen or heard, and so on. But a cursory inspection of the mentation reports indicates that there is a selective use of this kind of (metaphorical) psychological vocabulary. What kind of work is managed by the variable and selective reference to psychological states and processes?

Again from extract 1, the subject offers the following report.

- 16 S: (s'm'na) in slow motion like a (0.7) hh oh:: s'like a dri:ll=like  
 17 a (1.3) hh hhh I see the threads of a drill spinning round.

There are three components to the descriptive sequence: the subject reports movement, a drill, and then the threads of a drill spinning. In the first component there is an absence of any reference to how the image appeared in the subject's consciousness. Instead there is an unprefaced statement of a kind of movement: '(something) in slow motion'. The next component is 'like a drill', and it is prefaced by an elongated 'oh'. Only upon the production of the third component does the subject offer a report of how this

item appeared in consciousness: '*I see the threads of a drill spinning round*'.

Here we have clear evidence that everyday interactional competencies inform the production of reports of a conscious state. The report is constructed from three components. Three-partedness is a culturally available and normatively expected feature of listing practices in a range of discursive contexts: conversational interaction (Jefferson, 1990), political rhetoric (Atkinson, 1984) and accounts of paranormal experiences (Woolfitt, 1992). The construction of a three-part report of a mentation item suggests that orientation to socially organized communicative practices informs reports of utterly private mental states.

There is another feature of three-parted organization which is relevant here. Studies have shown that three-part lists can be used to indicate a general quality common to the items in the list. It is a way of marking some commonality between the objects or events so described (Jefferson, 1990). With respect to the section from extract 1, the use of a three-part list works to establish that the discrete items—'movement', 'drill' and 'a drill spinning'—are references to the same event in consciousness.

The production of the sense that there is a single phenomenological entity occupying conscious awareness is further managed by the psychological work undertaken in this sequence. The first component is introduced without any reference to the means by which this moment in consciousness was apprehended. The second component is introduced with an 'oh' preface. Heritage (1984b) has analysed the use of 'oh' in conversational materials and found that it is used to exhibit a change of state on the part of the speaker. However, this is not a claim that this particle is a public display of some real change at a cognitive or mental level. As Heritage observes, there are occasions when informings occur but are not marked with 'oh' receipts. For example, in medical consultations and news interviews there are occasions in which one participant informs another, but these kinds of interaction are distinctive because of the *absence* of 'oh' particles (Heritage, 1984b, p. 336). This strongly suggests that its occurrence is constrained by, and oriented to, the interactional contingencies of particular social contexts. In this extract, then, 'oh' acts a public display of 'coming to realize'. The 'I see' preface to the production of the third component introduces an element of certainty as to the nature of the events manifesting in consciousness, and thereby further establishes a sense of a unitary item.

The reference to psychological processes or mental events in a three-part construction thus incrementally establishes the sense that there is one determinate image or sensation manifesting in the subject's consciousness. And in this we begin to get a sense of the ways in which conscious awareness and its phenomena may be investigated as discursively managed objects.

## Discursive Psychological Work and Item Introductions in the Mentation Review

During the mentation review, the experimenter goes over the images and sensations reported by the subject to remind him or her of what he/she reported, and to encourage further recollections or expansion on particular images prior to the judging phase. Extract 2 provides an illustration of experimenter–subject interaction which occurs in mentation reviews. This extract is taken from the review phase of the subject whose mentation was discussed in the previous section. In this phase of the review, the experimenter raises the items reported in extract 1.

### (2) (01–18 E1/M: Mentation review)

- 1 E: 'hh and you saw a slope with a doorway at the to:p  
 2 S: yeah  
 3 E: 'hh then you mentioned that your eyes were s->beginning to ache a  
 4 bit<,  
 5 S: mm  
 6 E: 'h and then you saw the roof again and you were s:(l)  
 7 looking straight up (.) at it.  
 8 (2)  
 9 S: yeah, (.) yeah  
 10 (0.5)  
 11 E: then you had an (.) image of a- a toothbrush 'h still wrapped up in:  
 12 (.) its package 'hh and it was being spun in someone's h- fingers (0.3)  
 13 'hh you: er:m: (0.3) saw that on the toothbrush sai:d (0.2)i(t) it said  
 14 ↑toothbrush in big blue letters.  
 15 S: yeah  
 16 E: 'hh and then you saw: er: an impression of mickey mouse,  
 17 (0.5)  
 18 E: 'hhh and then you said a drill:=the threads of a drill spinning  
 19 around,  
 20 (1.2)  
 21 ((S swallowing approx. 1 second))  
 22 S: yeah (.) 's coming in from th- from the left (.) 'h >s't've (l)ika< like a  
 23 like a cross section through the earth I could see this huge 'hhh like  
 24 a sort've er: (0.2) channel tunnel drill  
 25 (0.8)  
 26 E: okay, (.) 'hh a humming top spinning (at-) a children's toy:s  
 ((continues))

There are various ways in which the experimenter can introduce items into the review. The experimenter can simply report the item; for example, 'a humming top spinning (at-) a children's toy:s' (line 26). The experimenter can introduce the item inconnection to the chronology of the original mentation: for example, '*then* you mentioned . . .' or '*and then* you saw . . .' (lines 3 and 6, respectively). The experimenter can use a 'you said' preface:

for example, 'and then *you said* a drill: . . .' (line 18). Finally, an item can be introduced by metaphorical reference to the way in which the subject became aware of this event in consciousness during the mentation. So the experimenter may refer to the subject's perception, or the way in which he or she became aware of a particular sensation: 'and *you saw* . . .' or 'then you had *an* (.) *image*. . .' (lines 1 and 11, respectively). These components can be used singly, or in combination.

There are a number of interesting issues. Is there an underlying organization which informs the experimenter's selection of components by which to introduce items into the review? Why does the experimenter use components which reference psychological states on some occasions and not others? This issue is not resolved by assuming that the experimenter took detailed notes during the mentation and is therefore simply repeating what the subject said. For example, in the part of the mentation shown in extract 1, the subject says 'toothbrush' and 'Mickey Mouse', unadorned by any reference to the metaphorical perceptual mechanism by which he became aware of these images. Yet in the mentation review, the experimenter introduces these items in the following way:

11 E: then you had an (.) image of a- a toothbrush

and

16 E: 'hh and then you saw: er: an impression of mickey mouse,

The experimenter has included references to images and impressions. In other cases, the experimenter deletes the subject's reference to his mode of awareness. For example, during the mentation the subject reports:

11 S: h I think it's a (.) big tooth brush with blue

12 letters on it.

and

17 S: a (1.3) hh hhh I see the threads of a drill spinning round.

In the subsequent mentation review, these items are introduced without reference to the subject's reports of 'I think' and 'I see'.

The way in which the experimenter introduces items into the review is not a mere report of the subject's mentation statements: the experimenter is formulating a version of what the subject said. This raises some intriguing analytic issues. Are there any patterned or recurrent features of these experimenter formulations? And if so, can we identify the interactional consequences of the design of experimenter turns in the review?

This may be a consequential matter for parapsychologists. The rationale behind the review is that it provides the subject with an opportunity to expand upon his or her experience during the mentation: to add more information about particular images, to correct the experimenter's mishearings or misunderstandings, and so on. After each item is introduced, there is



a 'slot' in the interaction in which the subject may provide further information. This orientation to the purpose of the review, and the kind of subject activity which could occur in this sequential location, is manifest in the way in which the experimenter will momentarily withhold moving directly to the next item. For example:

(3) (01–47 KD/F: Mentation review)

- 1 E: 'hh next an a:pple.  
 2 (0.5)  
 3 E: and then a ha:nd again.  
 4 (0.4)  
 5 E: 'hhhh a strange face with bulging ey:es and  
 6 teeth grinning.  
 7 (1)  
 8 E: next you had the impression of a ↑magazine and the  
 9 edge of the magazine  
 10 (0.6)  
 11 E: next a toadstool  
 12 (0.8)  
 13 E: 'h and then an underwater scene,  
 14 (0.6)  
 15 E: and there were worms heading towards a chest?  
 16 S: mm hm

It is noticeable that subjects tend to 'pass' on the opportunity to provide further information in these sequential locations. There are various ways in which this 'passing' may be managed. They can remain silent (e.g. extract 2, line 17; and extract 3, lines 2, 4, 7, 10, 12 and 14). Alternatively, they can use minimal continuers, such as 'mm' (e.g. extract 2, line 5; extract 3, line 16), and minimal confirmations (e.g. extract 2, line 15).

In extract 2, though, there is an instance of the subject using this sequential location to talk further about the just-introduced item; in this case, a drill. He goes on to report the direction in which it was moving; how it appeared in his consciousness ('like a cross-section through the earth'); and offers an observation on the scale of the drill. None of these details were contained in the subject's original mentation (lines 16 and 17 of extract 1). In this instance, then, the mentation review had elicited further discourse about the subject's conscious state during the crucial sending phase of the experiment.

But there is a curious feature of this sequence. Recall the various ways in which items can be raised in the review: as stand-alone descriptions; in relation to their occurrence in the chronology of the mentation; through invoking the subjects' mode of awareness or perception; and via a 'you said' preface. However, the mentation is a verbal report by the subject. Therefore, any item could logically be introduced with a 'you said' preface. But it is noticeable that 'you said' prefaces seem to occur irregularly. In extract 2, it

is used once; and the subject expands upon that item. But of the other items introduced in the absence of a 'you said' preface—the slope, aching eyes, the roof, the toothbrush, its lettering, Mickey Mouse, the spinning top and children's toys—the subject offers no further information. This is not a unique case.

(4) (01–80 E1/M: Mentation review)

- 1 E: 'hh and now the d<sub>o</sub>g again it's the same one 'hh with  
 2 skinny straight legs (.) and it's black and white  
 3 S: uh huh  
 4 S: uh huh  
 5 (0.6)  
 6 E: 'hh and then you said it looks like (0.3) tall tall  
 7 tree. 'hh bro<sub>w</sub>n  
 8 S: oh that was odd. (.) ye:s that was odd=  
 9 E: yeah.  
 10 S: =that looked like a telegraph pole with little green stumps  
 11 sticking out li<sub>k</sub>e that=I- I ca<sub>n</sub>'t imagine  
 12 E: (CH)uh::huh huh hu  
 13 S: that being in do you?  
 14 (.)  
 15 E: (h)okay? (.) 'hh eh<sub>r</sub>m shapes again.  
 ((continues))

The experimenter uses a 'you said' preface to introduce the 'tree' item, but does not use it to introduce the 'dog' or 'shapes' items. And, again, it is noticeable that the subject provides further information about the item introduced with a 'you said' preface. The subject offers a comment about the strangeness of the item: 'oh that was odd.(.) ye:s that was odd'. He then offers some further information about the image: 'that looked like a telegraph pole with little green stumps sticking out like that'. Finally, he appears to assess the likelihood of this image appearing in the target materials: 'I- I can't imagine that being in do you?'

These are preliminary observations, but it appears that in some circumstances 'you said' prefaces generate further description and comments from the subject. Why does this turn component seem to generate further information when other forms of item introduction, such as reports of the subjects' psychological states of perception or awareness, do not?

The 'you said' prefaces in extracts 3 and 4 exhibit the following structure ['and then'] + ['you said' preface] + [item]. However, this is unusual, as 'you said' components routinely occur when the experimenter explicitly marks his or her doubt or uncertainty about his/her record of the original mentation. Extract 5, which is a record of an entire mentation review, contains two instances.

## (5) (01–09: E3/M: Mentation review)

- 1 E: O:ka:y (0.6) 'hh first one wuz: uh::, (.) 'h uh sense of heat or melting,  
 2 (1.4)  
 3 E: .thh then::: deep and distant  
 4 (1.0)  
 5 S: °°mhm°°  
 6 E: (tk) uniform:, (1.3) 'hh dark shadow:: (1.8) waves: (1.3) deep dark tunnel  
 7 (1.7) spots of light (1.3) °°hhh°° uh::, and then I'm not sure what you said  
 8 next- >I think it was< ho::le  
 9 (0.6)  
 10 S: mm (.) °I think so°  
 11 E: °o::kay° (.) 'hhh then ever (.) ever decreasing circles?:  
 12 S: mm,  
 13 (0.6)  
 14 E: °o::kay:,° (0.7) (tk)'hh uh: space:: (1.0) °'h°stroking, (0.5) so:ft  
 15 S: (°°mhm°°m°°)  
 16 E: °m-m-° bubble (.) cloud, (1.7) diffus:e (0.5) 'hhh and then:,  
 17 shadows in::: I'm not sure what you said °is° i °°thi-°°>it sounded a bit  
 18 like< shadows in a: >in a< clipped; (.) sce:ne:  
 19 S: °mm,° (0.5) eclipse I think?  
 20 E: oh an eclipse: (.) o:kay, (2.6) 'h aw:ri:ght, (0.6) uh::, slow:: (1.0) 'h  
 21 penetrate (1.3) constant (1.3) 'h bubbling,=swirling,=growing, (2.0) flames  
 22 (1.1) 'h rapid movement=reaching=upwards, (1.7) lava, (1.5) engulfing  
 23 (1.8) 'h undulating (1.6) 'h whirlwind, (.)rapidly moving away:, (.) further  
 24 and further (1.0) 'h blue, (1.2) 'h absorption (1.3) sinking (.) or floating,  
 25 (1.2) ((*sound of pages being turned?*))  
 26 E: 'h pa:tterns (0.5) °m°cycles (.) °or° circles. (0.8) 'hhh(a) (1.1) RA:Ndom  
 27 (1.3) e:ven (2.1) 'h meandering (1.5) s:pee:d (0.9) °'h°  
 28 swirling,=shaking,=moving,=round and round. (.) spin (1.0) 'h change of  
 29 direction (1.1) a::nd then that was °so:: when I came in, was there  
 30 anything else? uh

In this extract, all but two items are introduced without any explicit framing or prefacing by the experimenter. And in these cases the subject offers minimal reciprocity (e.g. °°mhm°° in line 15), or is silent after the item introduction (e.g. the presentation of items in lines 20–29), thereby passing on the opportunity to expand upon the immediately presented item. At lines 7–8, and again at lines 17–18, however, the experimenter changes his presentational format, and a 'you said' component is included. These item introductions engender a change in the subject's reciprocity. Compared to minimal continuers, or silence, the subject's 'mm (.) °I think so°' (line 10), and °mm,° (0.5) eclipse I think?' (line 19) constitute increased reciprocity.

The question of why the experimenter provides a 'you said' preface to these two particular items can be answered if we examine some of the other elements that go to make up their overall presentation. In both cases, the experimenter displays an explicit level of doubt via specific lexical indicators, with 'I'm not sure' and 'I think it was' at lines 7–8, and 'I'm not

sure' at line 17. These indications of doubt are also presented as being linked to problems regarding the experimenter's hearing of the original mentation review items, since in both instances a candidate version of the item is produced. For the first 'you said' preface, the subject aligns to the candidate version 'hole', albeit with a relatively mitigated 'I think so' (line 10). For the second, the experimenter provides a version of a phrase, 'shadows in a clipped scene', which the subject corrects to 'eclipse' (line 19). This not only makes it easy to see the reason for the experimenter's misapprehension (given the phonetic similarity of 'clipped' and 'eclipse'), it also indicates the impact that such misapprehensions have on the written record.

In general terms, it can therefore be seen that 'you said' prefaces occur at sites of potential problems regarding the experimenter's presentation of what the subject has said during the mentation/sending period. As the author of utterances that have been implied by the phrase 'you said', the subject's accountability becomes relevant in terms of his acting as the arbiter for the accuracy of the experimenter's record, a record that has been mitigated by a marked display of doubt. That the subject orients to this role is evident in the way he both confirms the accuracy of the first 'you said' prefaced item, and provides a correction for the second. For the experimenter's part, the fact that he orients to the subject's role as arbiter is particularly evident in the second 'you said' preface. Here, he aligns to the subject's correction, 'eclipse', by both producing a newsmark ('oh', line 20) and repeating the corrected element of his candidate version.

Extracts 6 and 7 provide further instances of the use of 'you said' prefaces in conjunction with explicit doubt/uncertainty markers, and the subjects' subsequent increased reciprocity.

(6) (01–05: E3/F: Mentation review)

- 1 E: (tk) uh:: tunnel, going into a tunnel  
 2 S: |°hhh° yeah,  
 3 (0.4)  
 4 E: 'hh a:n I'm no:t sure:: °u:: ° uh:, (.) >you might've< (.) °°m:°° said  
 5 >something like< as:=as a present?  
 6 S: 'hh YEAH, I saw a (.) present wrapped up,  
 7 (0.2)  
 8 E: °mhm° (1.2) °o:kay° 'hh >and then a< cable ca:r,coming do:wn.

(7) (01–21: E3/M: Mentation review)

- 1 E: 'hhh and I think a little bit later on you said uh::: something like a grid  
 2 pattern,  
 3 (0.9)  
 4 S: yeah it's like:: (1.0) um::, (.) >I was gonna say< it's like, um: (0.5) >like  
 5 a< big (.) grid do:me like: (.) u::m::, >like on< Crystal Maze<sup>1</sup> or  
 6 >something< (0.4) like triangular shapes,

'You said' formulations, or their variants, seem to be strongly associated in these data with formulations of experimenter uncertainty about the accuracy

of the item so prefaced. The 'you said' preface, then, is a component of a form of repair device by which to initiate other repair. In our corpus, there is a fairly robust association of 'you said' prefaced and repair initiation. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that when it occurs in the absence of elicited doubt markers, as in extracts 2 and 4 (and below, in 8), subjects still orient to their subsequent turn as one in which clarification and expansion are relevant (and expected) activities.

### **Affiliation and Alignment in Experimenter–Subject Interaction**

There is experimental and anecdotal evidence from parapsychological research which suggests that a supportive or sympathetic relationship between experimenter and subject may have a significant bearing on the outcome of the subject's performance (Honorton, Ramsey, & Cabibbo, 1975; Morris et al., 1995; Watt, 2002; Wiseman & Schlitz, 1997). Consequently, there have been discussions of the significance of rapport between experimenter and subject (A. Parker, 2000; Schlitz & Honorton, 1992; Schmeidler & Edge, 1999). However, because parapsychologists have been primarily concerned with the existence of extra-sensorimotor communication, and the outcome of experimental procedures, there are few robust methodological tools available to them with which to investigate precisely those socially organized interpersonal events which might be cited as instances of rapport.

A conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychology may be of help here. If we were to treat the vernacular term 'rapport' as indicating forms of interpersonal affiliation, then we may begin to investigate how turns are designed to accomplish affiliative activities.

'You said' prefaced can lead to clarification/expansion sequences, which in turn lead to further responsive turns by the experimenter. In extract 4, just as the subject completes a report (subsequently repeated) on the strangeness of the item, the experimenter says 'yeah'. Then, slightly anticipating the onset of the turn-transition space (Sacks et al., 1974), the experimenter produces a short burst of laughter in overlap with the subject. A similar sequential trajectory can be observed in extract 8.

**(8)** (01–47 E1/F: Mentation review)

- 1 E: 'hh something re:d. ehm:: i- looks like it might be a
- 2 porcupine with lots of spines standing hhh standing up
- 3 S: yeah hh
- 4 E: and then a frog=a frog's face peering over something
- 5 (0.8)
- 6 E: 'hh a ghost? coming out of a door: or a chair: (0.5) like a mirror. (.)
- 7 in a funny house,
- 8 S: yeah=
- 9 E: ='hh shapes (0.3) ahr:: are in this funny house

- 10 and shapes look like ehm ↑bunny rabbits with weird ears  
 11 S: yeah (ch)hhuh huh 'hhhh  
 12 E: then you said sheep lots of sheep  
 13 S: hhhh (g)oads of sheep (pf)ah didn't know what  
 14 it was (hi-) 'h | hhh (k)huh uh ((smiley voice))  
 15 E: | ok(h)a(h)y ((smiley voice))  
 16 (0.5)  
 17 E: huh  
 18 (3.5)  
 19 E: okay 'hh something in the ceiling  
 ((continues))

This extract provides further evidence for the selective use of a 'you said' preface, and the way in which the subject treats the following turn as one in which expansion is relevant, thus constituting increased reciprocity. The subject's post-'you said' preface turn has several components. There is a report of the item '(g)oads of sheep'. (The subject in this trial was exhibiting flu-like symptoms and we are treating the '(g)oads' as an attempt at 'loads' in a voice made croaky by illness.) The subject then reports a lack of recognition of the sense or relevance of the image, which in turn establishes the strangeness of the item, and then laughs briefly (the subject's utterances sounds as though her mouth was formed into a smile prior to the burst of laughter). Subsequently, the experimenter matches this brief laugh by punctuating her 'okay' with a slight roll of breathy plosives, beginning just after the first contracted bubble of laughter in the subject's ongoing turn. This kind of next-positioned production of 'matching' laughter is a method by which a speaker can display alignment and affiliation with another's ongoing talk (Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987). In this interaction, then, the 'you said' preface seems to initiate a sequence in which the experimenter may demonstrate some broad affiliation with the content of the subject's prior utterance, and also the activity it performs.

These kinds of observations also offer the basis for comparative analysis of occasions from which such affiliative or alignment activities are absent. For example, in extract 8, the subject receipts an item with a minimal confirmation, 'yeah', which is followed by a distinct burst of laughter' (ch)hhuh huh hhhh' (line 11). But in this instance, there is no matched affiliative laughter from the experimenter. What, then, are the properties of those sequential environments in which subject laughter is matched in the experimenter's subsequent turn, and what is different about those instances in which the experimenter's subsequent turn attends to other, non-affiliative activities? Formal analysis of these issues will be able to offer a technical account of the interactional organization of affiliative activities (and their absence) which can inform parapsychologists' reflections on the significance of the 'warmth' of the relationship or rapport between experimenter and subject.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have argued for the relevance of a conversation-analytic-informed discursive psychological approach to the analysis of verbal communication in parapsychology laboratory experiments, and sketched some of the kinds of empirical questions it might explore. We have offered some preliminary observations on the ways in which the phenomena of consciousness are reported; the sequential organizations which characterize the selection or absence of (metaphorical) references to psychological states or perceptual modes; and we have begun to explicate the delicate interactional frameworks through which interpersonal affiliation and alignment may be managed. Analysis of interaction in parapsychology laboratory experiments is, therefore, a rich seam for discursive psychological work. These kinds of studies can enhance our understanding of the ways in which a world of ostensibly inner psychological phenomena is realized through participants' contributions to socially organized communicative projects. And although these observations have been grounded in discussion of a particular laboratory procedure, we believe they are relevant to parapsychological research more generally, in laboratories, and in the field, in the study of spontaneous anomalous experiences.

The (broadly) constructionist epistemology of a discursive parapsychology will clash with parapsychologists' core interest to establish the objective existence and properties of 'real' cognitive phenomena. Indeed, there may be hostility to any approach which departs from the realist epistemology which informs orthodox scientific research, or which seems to reject traditional parapsychological questions in favour of the study of discourse and communication (Parker, 2001). However, we believe that suspicion about the study of laboratory interaction is misplaced, as it can offer real benefits to parapsychologists.

As we have already indicated, a conversation-analytic-informed informed discursive parapsychology can offer a formal, technical account of the ways in which experimenters and subjects use everyday communicative competencies during experiments, exposing the otherwise tacit procedures through which experiments are conducted. At the very least, then, parapsychologists will know more about the ways in which they do their work; and this in turn may inform subsequent refinement of the experimental procedure, or the development of training programmes for experimenters. Informed by a conversation-analytic sensitivity to the social organization of interaction, discursive parapsychology can make a clear empirical contribution to parapsychology's project, whatever the scientific verdict on the status of evidence for anomalous communication. And if the findings from parapsychological studies do gain acceptance among the scientific community, it will be imperative to know more of the relationship between experimenter and subject during laboratory procedures.

But even if evidence for anomalous communication ultimately fails to convince the scientific community, parapsychological research is still valuable. The study of apparent extra-sensorimotor communication in ganzfeld experiments contributes directly to debates in the study of consciousness.

One of the key debates in consciousness studies concerns a methodological problem. It is argued that more formal scientific approaches need to be supplemented by qualitative studies of the phenomenological features of conscious experience: what consciousness is *like* (Chalmers, in press). There are various techniques which consciousness researchers have used to study the lived experience of consciousness. Most of these require subjects to introspect about their experiences and then record their observations, usually in some form of verbal report. Consciousness researchers, then, are working from verbal descriptions of (what are treated as) private mental experiences. However, it is acknowledged by researchers themselves that there are few clear methodological techniques with which to analyse these kinds of verbal data (Cardena, 2004; Jack & Roepstorff, 2003). Discursive psychology and conversation analysis offer precisely the kinds of formal and rigorous empirical techniques for which consciousness researchers are calling. Indeed, analysis of the discourse of the ganzfeld procedure is, in part, a study of the discursive constitution of consciousness. The empirical observations on the communicative skills which underpinned the production of mentation narratives stand as a tentative example of a social scientific contribution to the study of consciousness. To an important degree, then, a discursive parapsychology would establish empirical 'common ground' between parapsychology and the study of consciousness.

This may be significant. Many parapsychologists have argued that it would be to parapsychology's advantage to develop strong links with other research disciplines. There would be intellectual rewards, such as a cross-fertilization of research topics and methodologies; and there would be institutional benefits, in that strong relationships with established disciplines would strengthen parapsychology's academic standing (Morris, 2001; White, 1990; see also Zingrone, 2002). One way for parapsychology to build in the 21st century, then, is to develop and nurture collaborative research programmes with other disciplines. Discursive psychological studies of the communicative practices through which parapsychological laboratory work is accomplished would constitute both recognition of complementary interdisciplinary research interests, and a first step towards their investigation.

### **Appendix: Transcription symbols**

The transcription symbols used here are common to conversation-analytic research, and were developed by Gail Jefferson. The following symbols are used in the data.



- (0.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
- (.) A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates pause in the talk less than two tenths of a second.
- 'hh A dot before an 'h' indicates speaker in-breath. The more 'h's, the longer the inbreath.
- hh An 'h' indicates an out-breath. The more 'h's the longer the breath.
- (( )) A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity. For example ((*banging sound*))
- A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound.
- ::: Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
- (guess) The words within a single bracket indicate the transcriber's best guess at an unclear fragment.
- . A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
- Under Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.
- ↑↓ Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
- CAPITALS With the exception of proper nouns, capital letters indicate a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
- ◦ Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
- ◦◦ Double degree signs have been used to indicate whispered or extremely quiet talk.
- > < 'More than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.
- = The 'equals' sign indicates contiguous utterances. For example:
- S2: yeah September [seventy six=  
 S1: [September
- S2: =it would be
- S2: yeah that's right
- [ Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech  
 ] indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
- A more detailed description of these transcription symbols can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix–xvi)

## Note

1. *The Crystal Maze* is a UK television game show.

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